

LCQ10: Pet-friendly measures

Following is a question by the Hon Benson Luk and a written reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (February 21):

Question:

Section 10B of the Food Business Regulation (Cap. 132X) stipulates that no person shall bring any dog onto any food premises, and no person engaged in any food business shall knowingly suffer or permit the presence of any dog on any food premises. In addition, with the exception of Inclusive Parks for Pets, dogs are not allowed on most of the facilities (including rest gardens or ball courts facilities) of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD). However, it is learnt that in recent years, the concept of pet-friendliness has been growing both globally and in Hong Kong, with various places successively introducing a range of relevant measures. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has plans to amend the relevant legislation or requirements to relax the restrictions on the entry of dogs into restaurants and various public facilities under the LCSD; if so, of the specific details (including the timetable); if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it will, by drawing reference from pet-friendly policies in other places, further relax various restrictions related to dogs (including boarding public transport with dogs, going in and out of public facilities and private shopping malls with dogs) on a pilot basis and in an orderly manner; if so, of the specific directions; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) as it has been reported that some airlines in the Mainland have already introduced a "pet cabin" service, which allows pet owners to register prior to departure in order to take their pets in cages with them into the cabin, thus avoiding cumbersome application procedures, whether the authorities have plans to draw reference from the Mainland's practices and introduce a similar pet transport arrangement that is simple and convenient; if so, of the specific details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) given that the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department currently classifies source places of imported cats/dogs into three groups, with those from Group III places (including regions such as the Mainland, Macao, South-East Asia and the Middle East) subject to a 120-day quarantine, and it is learnt that due to the limited number and area of the quarantine facilities, there is usually a waiting period of five to seven months before a place becomes available, causing great inconvenience to talents who intend to come to Hong Kong for work or settlement, whether the authorities have plans to streamline the quarantine procedures for cats/dogs from Group III places; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Transport and Logistics Bureau, Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau, the Development Bureau, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department and the Housing Department, my reply to the question of the Hon Benson Luk is as follows:

(1) As pet keeping has become increasingly common in Hong Kong, there has been more attention in society to bringing animals to use public facilities and other animal-related measures. In general, the Government needs to take into account different factors when considering whether to relax certain restrictions on dogs, to achieve the policy objective of facilitating animals and people to co-exist harmoniously.

Regarding bringing dogs into food premises, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) has from time to time received complaints about certain food premises allowing customers who bring pet dogs inside. On the other hand, in recent years, there are also views in the society hoping to bring along pet dogs to dine in food premises. The existing regulatory requirement prohibiting dogs (except guide dogs) from entering food premises have been in place for close to 30 years. The Government understands that there has been changes in the societal culture but would also have to strike a balance on the need to safeguard public health and hygiene, etc. The Environment and Ecology Bureau, together with the FEHD, is reviewing the current situation as well as the existing policy and legislation with reference to the experiences in other places and the views of the public. It is expected that the review will take around one year.

As for public facilities under the LCSD, the LCSD currently manages more than 1 600 public pleasure grounds in Hong Kong. In recent years, the LCSD has actively responded to requests for opening up individual parks to members of the public for use with their pets, and has been liaising with District Councils from time to time, to select suitable locations as pet gardens. Pet gardens are specially designed for use by pets and are normally provided with fences and double pet gates to prevent pets from running away. Depending on the actual environment, ancillary facilities provided normally include dog latrines/dog excreta collection bins and hand-washing facilities. Since 2010, the number of pet gardens under the LCSD has increased from 19 to 52.

Furthermore, to satisfy the public's need for opening up more parks, to allow members of the public to bring their pets into parks, the LCSD launched Inclusive Park for Pets in 2019, with the objecting of enabling park users and pets to use park facilities together in an inclusive environment. To keep in line with the concept of enabling the shared use of park facilities among different users, members of the public are required to keep their pets on a leash and under proper control in the venues, so as to avoid causing nuisance to other users and dogs. There are currently already more than 170 Inclusive Parks for Pets. In general, with the support of the local community, the new parks completed by the LCSD in recent years have all been opened up for

public use as Inclusive Parks for Pets. The LCSD is open and proactive to opening up more of its venues as Inclusive Parks for Pets.

Regarding cultural venues, in view of the different natures of the venues and facilities from public pleasure grounds, according to relevant regulations, members of the public are generally not allowed to bring dogs into the venues of civic centres, museums and libraries under the LCSD, except for the visually impaired bringing guide dogs along into the venue facilities. The LCSD will balance the views of different stakeholders and users of venues and facilities and review relevant arrangements from time to time.

(2) Currently, operators of some of the public transport services, including ferries, public light bus and non-franchised buses, may decide at their discretion whether to allow passengers to board with pets. As regards the Mass Transit Railway and franchised buses with high daily patronage and limited compartment spaces, passengers are currently prohibited from travelling with pets except for guide dogs accompanying the visually impaired. When considering whether to relax the restriction on passengers travelling with pets for these public transport services, the Government shall consider and balance different factors, including the space and carrying capacity of the compartments, reaction of the pets in the travelling environment, as well as the potential impact on other passengers. The Government will continue to keep in view relevant suggestions for considering whether a change to the existing arrangement is necessary.

Regarding public facilities, apart from the aforementioned LCSD facilities, to facilitate access for tenants and visitors with special needs, guide dogs are welcome in premises of the Hong Kong Housing Authority, including domestic premises, shopping centres and other facilities. The Art Park of the West Kowloon Cultural District also provides pet-friendly space. Apart from welcoming visitors to bring their pets, the Art Park provides facilities such as designated pet zone and pet waste bins etc., to create an inclusive environment for pets. The West Kowloon Cultural District Authority will continue to adopt a welcoming and accessible-for-all approach for managing the Art Park and enhance the facilities and services offered in the Art Park through different measures.

Regarding private premises, land leases generally do not restrict on bringing animals (including dogs) in or out of private properties. The property owner may decide whether animals are allowed in their premises and privately operated common space.

(3) The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) requires that all animals imported into Hong Kong must be transported as manifested cargo. Animal owners travelling to Hong Kong by plane cannot bring their animals into the cabin. This requirement aims to reduce the risk of introducing rabies into Hong Kong, safeguarding public health. Rabies is a contagious disease, causing fatality to mammals (including humans). Nearly 60 000 people die of rabies globally every year. Manifested cargo helps clearly track the transportation of animals from the exporting country to Hong Kong.

Furthermore, animals imported from different sources have varying risks of rabies. Hence, animals must be placed in cages at all times during transportation, ensuring that they have no contact with other animals. If animals are transported in the cabin or as carry-on luggage, one cannot rule out the possibility of the animals coming into contact with other animals of unknown health status during transportation (including waiting to board and during transit).

As for departing flights, the AFCD does not impose restrictions on the method of transportation of animals. Individual airlines may decide, based on commercial operations, whether to provide "pet cabin" services, but the transportation arrangements should cater for the welfare needs of the animals concerned. When formulating service conditions related to animal transportation, airlines (including those that are not registered in Hong Kong) would generally make reference to the relevant legislations of the place where the plane is registered and/or relevant regulations of the International Air Transport Association. Individual airlines may have different regulations regarding passengers bringing animals on flights.

(4) According to the Public Health (Animals and Birds) Regulations (Cap. 139A) and the Rabies Regulation (Cap. 421A), the AFCD regulates the import of cats and dogs from other places through a permit system, with a view to preventing the transmission of animal diseases including rabies into Hong Kong.

For importation of cats and dogs, the AFCD classifies places into three groups according to different risk of rabies, with reference to information about the surveillance of animal diseases provided by the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH). Group I includes rabies-free places (i.e. where rabies has been absent for a long time); Group II includes places where rabies cases are few and under effective control; and Group III includes places where rabies cases are reported and not under effective control. In general, the places that do not meet the requirements of Group I or II (or their situations cannot be determined) will be included in Group III.

Since Groups I and II places are considered of lower risk of rabies, cats and dogs imported from these places are exempt from quarantine, provided that relevant requirements can be fulfilled. The risk of rabies is higher or uncertain in Group III places. Since the incubation period of rabies in animals can be up to several months, to prevent the transmission of rabies into Hong Kong, the AFCD generally requires a quarantine period of no less than 120 days for the cats and dogs imported from these places. The AFCD has kept in view WOAH's notifications on latest developments in animal diseases and refined the quarantine requirements concerned when necessary. As biotechnology has developed in recent years, the AFCD is conducting a risk review, to explore the feasibility of shortening the quarantine period for cats and dogs imported from some Group III places (including the Mainland), by measures such as rabies vaccination and rabies antibody titer testing. The review aims to refine the prevailing quarantine regime and related risk-management measures, of cats and dogs imported from Group III places.

At the same time, the AFCD's Animal Management and Animal Welfare Building Complex in Kai Tak is expected to come into operation in August 2024. The complex will provide several animal quarantine facilities, thereby reducing the waiting time for quarantine facilities for cats and dogs and enhancing the AFCD's quarantine work for imported cats and dogs.

LCQ13: New Industrialisation Funding Scheme

Following is a question by the Hon Jimmy Ng and a written reply by the Secretary for Innovation, Technology and Industry, Professor Sun Dong, in the Legislative Council today (February 21):

Question:

The Government has enhanced the New Industrialisation Funding Scheme (NIFS). Starting from January 8 this year, NIFS allows each company to have a total of three applications submitted in respect of projects for setting up new smart production lines in Hong Kong or have a total of three relevant projects ongoing at any one time, and provides a total maximum funding of \$45 million. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the current number of companies which have submitted two or more applications in respect of projects for setting up new smart production lines (with a breakdown by the industry to which the applicant companies belong), and the number of applications involved;
- (2) whether the number of applications has increased upon the enhancement of NIFS; if so, whether the average vetting and approval time has increased as a result; if so, of the details, and whether the authorities will increase the manpower for vetting and approving applications; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) whether it will increase the proportion of matching funding from the Government under NIFS, for example, by switching to the provision of funding by the Government on a 1:1 matching basis; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (4) whether it will extend the funding scope of NIFS to assist manufacturers in upgrading existing production facilities and equipment, expanding high value-added business and exploring innovative operating models, etc, so as to promote the enhancement of operational efficiency among traditional manufacturing industries; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (5) whether it will extend the geographical funding scope of NIFS to regions

outside Hong Kong so that, for example, Hong Kong businessmen setting up new smart production lines in the Mainland can likewise obtain funding; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My consolidated reply to the questions raised by the Hon Jimmy Ng is as follows:

The New Industrialisation Funding Scheme (formerly known as Re-industrialisation Funding Scheme) under the Innovation and Technology Fund was launched in July 2020 to subsidise manufacturers to establish new smart production lines in Hong Kong on a 1 (Government):2 (enterprise) matching basis. The Scheme used to require applicant enterprise to have no more than one project at any one time. To strengthen the efforts in supporting enterprises to adopt smart manufacturing in Hong Kong and to seize market opportunities, the Chief Executive announced the enhancement measure of allowing an applicant enterprise to carry out up to three projects concurrently with a total maximum funding of \$45 million under the Scheme as one of the policy measures in the 2023 Policy Address. The enhancement measure has been launched in early January this year.

After the enhancement of the Scheme, the Secretariat has received several new applications, the trend of which is similar to the past; and has not yet received any second project application from enterprises. We will make use of existing manpower and resources of the Secretariat to process the applications which may be increased after the enhancement. We will also regularly review the operation of the Scheme. Depending on actual operational need, we will seek additional manpower and resources in accordance with the established mechanism.

We welcome companies from traditional manufacturing sector as well as emerging industries to apply for matching fund under the Scheme to establish new smart production lines for expanding their high-value added businesses and enhancing their operational efficiencies. Relevant examples include a local food manufacturer supplying local restaurants and food manufacturers with fresh liquid egg, through funding under the Scheme, establishes a smart production line for fresh liquid egg products in order to enhance production efficiency and capacity. Another example is a textiles and clothing manufacturer, through funding under the Scheme, establishes a digital whole-garment knitwear smart production line to enhance production efficiency and reduce production cost. To support the diversified development of Hong Kong's economy, enhance the competitiveness of Hong Kong manufacturing sector and encourage the "Made in Hong Kong" brand, we hope to drive and support enterprises to establish new smart production lines locally through the Scheme. As such, there is currently no plan to extend the funding scope of the Scheme to cover area outside Hong Kong.

As smart production line involves new technologies, the Government provides subsidy instead of loan to the applicant enterprises under the

Scheme, with a view to lowering the investment cost of funded enterprises in order to encourage more enterprises to establish smart production lines in Hong Kong. Although the enterprises still have to invest in two-thirds of the cost of production lines concerned, there is no need for them to return the subsidy granted. The funding scope of the Scheme covers expenses directly related to the establishment of the new smart production lines in Hong Kong, including the costs of procurement, installation and commissioning of the machinery, equipment or apparatus, which will become the assets of the enterprises. At the same time, the production lines concerned will improve the production efficiency and market competitiveness of the enterprises and bring actual economic benefits to the enterprises concerned after their commissioning. Moreover, an enterprise could obtain a maximum of \$45 million funding after enhancement of the Scheme. We consider the existing 1 (Government):2 (enterprise) fund matching ratio appropriate. It could on one hand attract enterprises to put more resources on new industrialisation by establishing production lines in Hong Kong, and ensure that enterprises would carefully consider if the projects have potential and would be cost-effective on the other, contributing to the diversified development of Hong Kong's economy.

LCQ1: Celebrating the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China

â€‹Following is a question by the Hon Chan Yung (Hon Vincent Cheng to ask on his behalf) and a reply by the Secretary for Home and Youth Affairs, Miss Alice Mak, in the Legislative Council today (February 21):

Question:

There are views that this year marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, which holds exceptional significance. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it will set up a high-level steering group to oversee the relevant promotional and celebratory events; if so, of the expected time to commence work;
- (2) of the key events and specific plans to be put in place to celebrate the National Day; and
- (3) how it will encourage the active participation of various sectors and classes of society together?

Reply:

President,

On October 1, 1949, the People's Republic of China (PRC) proclaimed its founding. This great event completely changed the history of modern China, which had been poor, weak and bullied by others. The Chinese nation has since embarked on a broad path to achieve great rejuvenation. For more than 70 years, Chinese people of all ethnic groups have embraced struggles and worked hard together with one heart and one mind, making great achievements that have impressed the world.

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government has all along attached great importance to the celebration of the important historical milestone of the founding of the PRC. Every year, the HKSAR Government celebrates the National Day with the public and promotes patriotism and national pride through a series of activities and publicity programmes. My consolidated reply in response to the questions raised by the Hon Chan Yung is as follows:

The anniversary of the founding of the PRC has always been an important event for the HKSAR. As the 75th anniversary of the founding of the PRC, this year's October 1 anniversary is all the more significant and manifests the glorious achievements of our country from standing up, growing prosperous to becoming strong under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, thereby building China into a great modern socialist country in all respects and promoting the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. In order to properly implement the activities and programmes to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the founding of our country, the Chief Executive has instructed the Chief Secretary for Administration (CS) to lead the various bureaux and departments in making preparations for the National Day celebrations. In this connection, the CS has given instructions at the meetings of the Steering Committee on District Governance and the Task Force on District Governance held in January 2024, asking all bureaux and departments to make concerted efforts to plan and take forward the preparatory work for the National Day celebrations on all fronts, with a view to creating a colourful and enthusiastic National Day atmosphere and cultivating people's sense of patriotism at different levels of the community.

As instructed by the CS, apart from the key programmes such as the annual large-scale National Day reception, flag-raising ceremony, variety show and fireworks display, all bureaux and their departments will plan an array of celebratory activities rich in content and diversity under their respective areas, with a view to enabling more members of the public from different backgrounds and age groups to take part and share the joy of the National Day. In addition, the 18 District Offices under the Home Affairs Department will work with their respective District Councils to organise key National Day celebratory events with local characteristics in various districts to share the joy with the public. Apart from fostering patriotic sentiments, the HKSAR Government will also organise a series of thematic National Day celebratory events to showcase to all visitors from the Mainland

and other places the unique advantages and attractions of Hong Kong in terms of the staunch support we receive from the Motherland and our global outlook.

Various bureaux and departments have progressively commenced early-stage preparatory work for National Day celebrations this year, including planning and preparing for relevant publicity arrangements. Moreover, bureaux and departments will plan for displays of a wider variety of publicity materials in celebration of the 75th anniversary of the founding of the PRC at their venues and buildings, and step up the scale and creativity of their festive decorations at popular and iconic locations, so as to jointly foster an intense festive ambience, promote the spirit of patriotism and mobilise the active participation of all sectors of the community in celebrating the National Day together.

The Steering Committee on District Governance chaired by the CS and the Task Force on District Governance chaired by the Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration will continue to serve as the high-level steering structures of the HKSAR Government's preparatory work for the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the founding of the PRC, and guide and co-ordinate the efforts of various bureaux and departments in the preparations for and implementation of various activities and publicity programmes in celebrating the National Day.

The National Day is an occasion for celebration by the entire nation. The HKSAR Government believes that different sectors and organisations in society will actively echo and show support correspondingly, such as organising various activities and rolling out different offers in their respective areas, in an effort to contribute to celebrating the important festive occasion of the 75th anniversary of the founding of the PRC. The HKSAR Government is confident that, with the strong and united support of the whole society, the celebrations will be smoothly organised, thereby bringing joyful colours and pride to Hong Kong on October 1 this year.

[LCQ14: The e-154 App](#)

Following is a question by Hon Lam San-keung and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (February 21):

Question:

On June 1, 2021, the Hong Kong Police Force introduced the "e-154 App" (the App) which applies voice input technology. As at March 15, 2022, the Police Force allocated over 900 tablets, 300 smart phones and 240 portable printers to crime officers. However, some people who gave witness statements (statements) at police stations have said that police officers still took

statements from them in the traditional way and the process was very time-consuming. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the current percentage of the number of statements taken with the use of the App in the total number of statements taken;

(2) whether the records taken with the use of the App are subsequently processed in electronic form (i.e. when they are delivered to the courts for use in judicial proceedings, and when prosecuting and defence counsel apply for obtaining the relevant records); if not, of the reasons for using paper records; and

(3) of the total expenditure incurred by the App every year and, compared with the traditional way of taking statements, whether the relevant total expenditure has been reduced?

Reply:

President,

In support of the strategic direction of "Embracing the Use of Technology for Policing in the Digital Age" of the Hong Kong Police Force (the Police), the Police launched the "e-154" App on June 1, 2021. Tablets, smart phones and portable printers were distributed to all police districts. Investigation team officers can take witness statements anytime and anywhere with their portable devices in hand, thereby saving time and enhancing their work efficiency and effectiveness.

After consulting the Police, my reply to different parts of the question is as follows:

(1) In 2023, the "e-154" App took about 37 200 statements, which was more than six times the figure in 2022, reflecting an increase in the use of the App. As the Police do not maintain statistics on the total number of statements taken over the territory, the percentage mentioned in the question is not available.

(2) In criminal cases, the prosecution has the burden of establishing the truthfulness and admissibility of the evidence. As statements taken by police officers are likely to be used in future judicial proceedings, records taken with the use of the "e-154" App need to be printed out and signed by the statement-taking officers and the persons from whom the statements are taken, so as to ensure the admissibility of the statements in judicial proceedings.

(3) The "e-154" App involves an annual recurrent expenditure of about HK\$3.3 million. The Police do not maintain other figures mentioned in the question.

LCQ21: Non-farebox revenue of ferry service operators

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hok-fung and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (February 21):

Question:

It is learnt that the patronage of cross-harbour ferries has been falling in recent years, and some licensed ferry service operators (operators) have sought to reduce the pressure for fare increases through non-farebox revenue. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective farebox and non-farebox revenues of various operators in the past five years (set out in a table);

(2) as it is learnt that in order to assist operators in generating non-farebox revenue, the Government has permitted them to carry out a number of commercial activities at the piers leased to them by the Government, and the commonly approved commercial activities include subletting parts of pier premises for commercial concessions, such as retail shops, mobile communication radio base stations, and uses and activities such as restaurants and cafes subject to approval of the Town Planning Board (TPB), of the number of applications submitted by various operators to the Government for commercial activities at the piers subject to TPB's special approval in the past five years, and the details of such commercial activities;

(3) as it has been reported that Sun Ferry Services Company Limited (Sun Ferry) submitted an application for planning permission to the TPB at the end of last year for proposed Exhibition Hall and Shop and Services on a portion of the upper deck of Hung Hom (North) Ferry Pier, of the Government's role in the relevant application process for planning permission; whether the Government has in the past taken the initiative to submit any application for planning permission in respect of the planned uses of piers subject to TPB's approval; if so, of the details;

(4) of the average time taken by the Government to vet and approve operators' applications for subletting parts of the piers for commercial activities in the past five years; as there are views pointing out that the Government has taken quite a long time to vet and approve the aforesaid applications, whether the Government will consider subsidising operators to offer rent-free concessionary measures during the vetting and approval process, so as to attract tenants; if not, of the reasons for that;

(5) as it is learnt that Sun Ferry has leased out about 54 per cent of the

area of the seven piers it operates, whether the Government has gained an understanding of whether the reasons for parts of these piers not being leased out are related to obsolete pier facilities and inadequate ancillary facilities (e.g. water and electricity supply); if so, whether the Government has received any request to improve the ancillary facilities; if so, of the progress of the relevant work; and

(6) as it has been reported that the "Star" Ferry Company, Limited has put forth new ideas for pier operation to the Government in order to generate more non-farebox revenue, of the progress of the Government's study on such ideas?

Reply:

President,

There are currently nine ferry operators in Hong Kong operating 21 regular licensed passenger ferry routes. The Government has been taking various measures to reduce the operating costs of operators and help them identify ways to expand their non-farebox income to cross-subsidise the ferry operation. To facilitate the daily operation of ferry services, the Government provides ferry piers for 16 of the ferry routes. These piers are equipped with waiting areas and barrier-free facilities for passengers, and ancillary facilities such as rest rooms for ferry staff. The remaining five routes are using public piers or public landing steps to provide services.

Ferry operators are responsible for the daily operation of the ferry piers. To alleviate their expenses on using the piers, the Transport Department (TD) will co-ordinate the management and maintenance of these piers, for example, co-ordinating various works departments (including the Architectural Services Department, the Civil Engineering and Development Department, and the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department) to carry out regular structural repairs for facilities such as lifting platforms and ramps of ferry piers, improvement works for lighting systems, renovation of toilets, and upgrading works for power supply, etc, in order to ensure the safety and normal operation of pier structures and related facilities. Also, the Government has been reimbursing pier rentals to the ferry operators under the Elderly Concessionary Fares Scheme and offering the Special Helping Measures to 13 outlying island ferry routes by reimbursing them with pier-related expenses (such as electricity, water and cleaning charges) on an accountable basis, with a view to helping the operators maintain the financial viability of ferry services.

In consultation with the TD, the Planning Department (PlanD) and the Government Property Agency (GPA), my reply to various parts of the question raised by the Hon Chan Hok-fung is as follows:

(1) The Government all along encourages ferry operators to improve their long-term financial sustainability through a multipronged approach in terms of fare revenue, non-farebox revenue and support from the Government, in

order for them to continue to provide quality services. Given the commercial sensitivity of the actual farebox and non-farebox revenue of ferry operators, the requested information cannot be disclosed.

(2) to (5) In terms of assisting ferry operators in identifying ways to expand their non-farebox income, the Government allows them to sublet pier premises for commercial and retail purposes. These include letting out pier shops, renting out advertising lightboxes, as well as organising commercial activities in vacant pier spaces, in order to generate non-farebox revenue to cross-subsidise the operating expenses of ferries.

Depending on the nature of such commercial or retail activities at pier premises, the ferry operators may be required to submit applications to the Government or the relevant authorities to ensure that the proposed uses are in compliance with the relevant laws and regulations. For rental arrangements of the piers, the GPA will co-ordinate the processing of subletting applications for pier shops made by licensed ferry operators. It will consult relevant bureaux and departments and make decisions taking into account their opinions. As the details of and information required for each subletting application made to the GPA vary, the processing time of each case will be different and cannot be generalised. In general, if the application does not involve land uses which require planning permission, the vetting and approving time will be shorter. According to the records of the GPA, the median processing time for vetting and approving applications for subletting pier shops was approximately 70 days from 2019 to 2022, and 30 days in 2023 with the passing of the COVID-19 pandemic.

If the pier shop rental business involves land uses which require an application to the Town Planning Board (TPB) for planning permission, such an application must be made to the TPB pursuant to Section 16 of the Town Planning Ordinance. According to the records of the PlanD, the TPB considered a total of 16 planning applications related to government piers over the past five years (i.e. from 2019 to 2023). The uses under application were mainly for shops and services, while others included eating places, telecommunication radio base stations and offices. Most of the 16 applications were submitted by the ferry operators, while a few of them were submitted by shop operators. All 16 applications were approved by the TPB, with some of them approved with conditions. As mentioned above, the Government has been reimbursing pier rentals to ferry operators under the Elderly Concessionary Fares Scheme. Moreover, during the vetting and approving process, operators can apply for appropriate rent-free periods for tenants subject to circumstances of individual cases.

The TPB received an application for planning permission from the Sun Ferry Services Company Limited (Sun Ferry) for proposed exhibition hall and shop and services uses on a portion of the upper deck of Hung Hom (North) Ferry Pier in December 2023. Afterwards, further information was received in January 2024. The TPB will consider the application in accordance with the statutory process.

In fact, the Government has been proactively assisting ferry operators

in enhancing pier environment and facilities, in order to generate more non-farebox income. The TD always maintains close liaison with operators to understand their operational needs and carries out upgrading works as necessary. For instance, the TD is actively considering feasible options with relevant government departments and power companies to increase power supply at various piers (including Central Pier Nos. 4 to 6 and North Point (West) Ferry Pier currently used by the Sun Ferry) so as to build up the development potential of shop premises at the piers. We also understand that, as in the case of commercial activities in general, the letting out of pier shops is affected by a number of factors, including the overall economic situation of society, the budgets of commercial tenants and their considerations over the locations of the piers. With the gradual improvement of the overall economic environment, the Government will continue to actively assist ferry operators in optimising the use of pier premises to expand non-farebox income in order to support the long-term and sustainable operation of ferry routes.

(6) The Government has been closely liaising and exchanging views with the "Star" Ferry Company, Limited (Star Ferry) on its preliminary ideas on operation of the Star Ferry piers. In considering the suggestions, the Government must be vigilant in examining the relevant factors, including the cost-effectiveness of the project and the ferry service arrangement during the works period. Meanwhile, the Government will continue to actively assist Star Ferry in improving and increasing the spaces for pier shop operation and development. To this end, the TD, in co-ordination with relevant government departments, held a meeting with Star Ferry in early February 2024 to explore feasible options to enhance water and electricity supply facilities at the Tsim Sha Tsui Ferry Pier.